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Foucault and Shakespeare: Ceremony, Theatre, Politics

Stuart Elden (University of Warwick)

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Abstract

Foucault only refers to Shakespeare in a few places in his work. It has long been known that is intrigued by the figures of madness in *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. But he also occasionally refers to the history plays where there is the overthrow of one monarch by another, such as in *Richard II* or *Richard III*, arguing that “a part of Shakespeare’s historical drama really is the drama of the *coup d’État*”. In his 1976 Collège de France course, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’, where he treats the theme at most length, he intriguingly suggests that Shakespearean historical tragedy is “at least in terms of one of its axes, a sort of ceremony, or a rememorialization of the problems of public right”. Foucault was long fascinated by the theatre, and especially its relation to political ceremony. Many of Shakespeare’s plays, both histories and tragedies, thus demonstrate the importance of ritual and ceremony, a political theatre. This article examines the disrupted ceremony of *King Lear*, the repeated ceremony of *King John*, and the parody of the ceremonial in *Henry IV, Part One*. Together these plays open up a range of historical, theoretical and political questions. The concluding part of the article looks at Foucault’s 1972 lectures to further develop these thoughts on ceremony, theatre and politics.

Introduction

In the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in the newly available archive of Michel Foucault's papers, there is an undated note of four books he intends to read on Shakespeare.¹ The books are M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays*; Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V*; G. Wilson Knight, *The Sovereign Flower: On Shakespeare as the Poet of Royalism*; and Pierre Spriet's study of *Richard III*.² Only the last of these is a French text. The books are listed in a folder of notes on the divine right of kings, and while no notes on any of these four books are found in the folder, there are notes on related themes concerning ritual, ceremony, the sacred nature of kingship and the trial of Louis XVI. Why would Foucault have been interested in Shakespeare, given his predominant focus on French politics?

This paper is a standalone piece at the intersection of two ongoing projects – a study, in two books, of Foucault from the late 1960s to his death, on the basis of his lecture courses and archival material;³ and a book length analysis of the different ways that Shakespeare's plays shed light on the question of territory. While there is no reference to the question of territory in Shakespeare by Foucault, there are some interesting discussions of Shakespeare more generally in his work, and these will be my focus in this article.⁴

Shakespeare is briefly mentioned by Foucault in relation to the question of the author, and historically in his major essay on Nietzsche, but there are some more

sustained discussions. The most obvious, which has been known for some time, concerns the figures of madness that appear in *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. This article though will concentrate the more political reading of Shakespeare which can be found in the lecture courses rather than the books, especially around the theme of the ceremony at the intersection of theatre and politics. The lecture courses on this theme are from quite a specific period of Foucault's work, in the 1970s. This is the key focus of his interest in that decade: the discussion of madness is from the early 1960s, and the return to *King Lear* as an example of *parrēsia* comes from late in Foucault's life, in 1984.

The Deposed Monarch

In his lecture courses Foucault regularly discusses the deposed monarch. He occasionally notes the overthrow of one monarch by another, such as in *Richard II* or *Richard III*, arguing that "a part of Shakespeare's historical drama [*théâtre historique*] really is the drama of the *coup d'État*"⁵ But the discussion preceding this, in the *Security, Territory, Population* course, is revealing. Foucault stresses "the necessarily theatrical character of the *coup d'État*". This raises for him

the problem of theatrical practice in politics, or again the theatrical practice of *raison d'État*. The theater, theatrical practice, this dramatization [*théâtralisation*], must be a mode of manifestation of the State and of the sovereign as the holder of State power. In contrast with and in opposition to traditional ceremonies of royalty, which, from anointment to coronation up to the entry into towns or the funerals of

sovereigns, marked the religious character of the sovereign and articulated his power on religious power and theology, I think we could set this modern kind of theater in which royalty wanted to be shown and embodied, with one of its most important manifestations being the practice of the *coup d'État* carried out by the sovereign himself. So there is the appearance of a political theater along with, as the other side of this, the function of theater in the literary sense as the privileged site of political representation, and of representation of the *coup d'État* in particular.⁶

When Richard II is deposed by Henry IV; when Edward IV seizes the crown from Henry VI; or when Richard III usurps it from Edward V, only to be overthrown by Henry VII; these are kings replaced by kings. The King's head may have been cut off in a literal or figurative sense, but the King's body endured. For Foucault, the idea of a King being replaced with a different form of rule is much more interesting.

His example of this in the *Psychiatric Power* course is of a monarch well after Shakespeare's time, that of George III. Foucault takes the story from Philippe Pinel, who based it on the account by the King's doctor, Sir Francis Willis.⁷ It might be said that Alan Bennett's play, *The Madness of George III*, rather than Shakespeare, is a better dramatic representation of Foucault's argument.⁸

Bennett's play was turned into a film, known in North America as *The Madness of King George*, starring Nigel Hawthorne. As Bennett has the King say in that play:

I was the verb, the noun and the verb. Verb rules; subject: the King. I am not the subject now. Now I am the object, the King governed, the ruled. I am the subordinate clause, the insubordinate George.⁹

Foucault thinks that transition from King's rule to doctors' rule marks a significantly different political change:

Deposition [*destitution*] and therefore the king's fall; but my impression is that it is not the same type of fall as we find in, say, a Shakespearean drama: this is not Richard III threatened with falling under the power [*puissance*] of another sovereign, nor King Lear stripped of his sovereignty and roaming the world in solitude, poverty and madness. In fact, the king's [George III] madness, unlike that of King Lear, condemned to roam the world, fixes him at a precise point and, especially, brings him under, not another sovereign power [*un autre pouvoir souverain*], but a completely different type of power [*pouvoir*] which differs, term by term, I think from the power of sovereignty. It is an anonymous, nameless and faceless power; it is a power that is distributed between different persons. Above all it is a power that is expressed through an implacable regulation that is not even formulated, since, basically, nothing is said, and the text actually says that all the agents of this power remain silent. The silence of regulation takes over, as it were, the empty place left by the king's dethronement.¹⁰

This is a striking example, certainly, but one which is not entirely surprising given Foucault's work elsewhere. Foucault was looking for illustrative examples for the replacement of a king by a different type of power, and while in France that had certainly happened with the guillotine (or, in Britain over a century before with a Frenchman's axe), he felt that political thought had failed to keep up with the situation. Hence his famous line that "in political thought and analysis we still have not cut off the head of the king".¹¹ This course, dating from 1974, predates *Discipline and Punish*, and what we find in this work is an expansion and development of claims made in the closing parts of *History of Madness*, especially the chapter on 'The Birth of the Asylum', in the light of the new concepts of power and discipline Foucault had been developing in his early 1970s lecture courses. For Foucault, the suppression of a mad figure by hospitals or asylums serves as illustrations of the conflict between the individual and the mechanisms of discipline. The *coup d'État* therefore might therefore appear less interesting than moments when the sovereign is replaced, not with another sovereign, but with a different, more anonymous, form of power.

Intriguingly, Foucault suggests that the case of George III is an example of "basically, a ceremony, a ceremony of deposition [*destitution*], a sort of reverse coronation [*sacre à l'envers*] in which it is quite clearly shown that it involves placing the king in a situation of complete subordination; you remember the words: 'all trappings of royalty having disappeared', and the doctor, who is, as it were, the effective agent of this dethronement, of this deconsecration, explicitly telling him that 'he is no longer sovereign'".¹²

So this is not a case of one sovereign power falling under another sovereign power, but the transition from a sovereign power—decapitated by a madness that has seized hold of the king's head, and dethroned by the ceremony that shows the king that he is no longer sovereign—to another power. In place of this beheaded and dethroned power, an anonymous, multiple, pale, colorless power is installed, which is basically the power that I will call discipline.¹³

Political Ceremony, Political Theatre

It is this theme of ceremony that opens up a possibility for developing a reading of Foucault and Shakespeare together. 'Ceremony' is an intriguing word, deriving from Old French and Medieval Latin, and meaning the ritual observances and sacred rites of a religious service. As such, 'religious ceremony' is a pleonasm, in the sense that all ceremonies have at least the trace of a religious lineage, even if they appear to be for secular purposes. Foucault develops this theme in 1976, in the '*Society Must Be Defended*' course, which is where he treats the question in relation to Shakespeare at most length. In one key passage he makes the claim that the tragedies are not merely representations of historical events, but themselves a kind of ceremony or political theatre.

At the time when the jurists were exploring the archives in an attempt to discover the basic laws of the kingdom, a historians' history was taking shape, and it was not power's ode to itself. It should not be forgotten that in the seventeenth century, and not only in France, tragedy was one of the

great ritual forms in which public right was displayed and in which its problems were discussed. Well, Shakespeare's "historical" tragedies are tragedies about right and the king, and they are essentially centered on the problem of the usurper and dethronement [*déchéance*], of the assassination of kings and the birth of the new being who is constituted by the coronation of a king. How can an individual use violence, intrigue, murder, and war to acquire a public might that can bring about the reign of peace, justice, order, and happiness? How can illegitimacy produce law? At a time when the theory and history of right are trying to weave the unbroken continuity of public might, Shakespearean tragedy, in contrast, dwells] on the wound [*plaie*], on the repeated injury that is inflicted on the body of the kingdom when kings die violent deaths and when illegitimate sovereigns come to the throne. I think that Shakespearean tragedy is, at least in terms of one of its axes, a sort of ceremony, a sort of re-memorialization of the problems of public right. The same could be said of French tragedy, of that of Corneille and, of course, especially Racine.¹⁴

Several things might be said of this. One key point is that his focus is on what he calls the 'historical' tragedies. In the First Folio Shakespeare's plays were divided into comedies, histories and tragedies, but the lines between genres are blurred. Some of the so-called history plays bear the label of 'tragedy' in their earlier printed Quarto editions: *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second* and *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. By the time of the Folio these have become the more descriptive and historical *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second* and *The*

Life and Death of King Richard the Third – for the latter, this is in the table of contents and head title, though it retains ‘tragedy’ in the running heads. Other plays that might be viewed as tragedies do not exist in Quarto editions, and in the Folio appear as histories: *The Life and Death of King John*, for example.

Equally, many of the plays commonly seen as ‘tragedies’ are at least semi-historical. *Macbeth* is the obvious play to think as one about usurpation and dethronement, and the tangled question of whether Macbeth can ever secure his rule. The Roman tragedies from *Coriolanus* to *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* have a strong historical heritage; *Cymbeline* and *King Lear* treat legendary figures of ancient Britain. *Hamlet* concerns a usurped monarch and the denial of the rightful succession to the murdered king’s son. Its original publication was under the title of *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet*. At the end of the play young Fortinbras – himself not succeeding his father to the throne of Norway, which had similarly gone to the dead king’s brother – takes the Danish crown. Hamlet’s final words are that “I do prophesy th’ election lights/On Fortinbras: He has my dying voice”.¹⁵ Fortinbras himself accepts: “with sorrow I embrace my fortune./I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,/Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me”.¹⁶ For Foucault, this theme is fundamental to Shakespeare’s work:

This problem of the infamy of sovereignty, of the discredited [*disqualifié*] sovereign, after all, is Shakespeare’s problem: It is precisely the problem posed by the royal tragedies, without, it seems to me, the sovereign’s infamy ever having been theorized.¹⁷

How then do the plays connect to the theme of “ceremony... rememorialization of the problems of public right”?

King Lear and Macbeth

There are elements in some of the plays already mentioned – the ‘love test’ in the first scene of *King Lear*, which Foucault calls “a story of *parrësia*, a test of frankness”,¹⁸ is essentially a distribution of lands to Lear’s daughters, and arguably more importantly their husbands. The Dukes of Albany and Cornwall, being married to the King’s eldest daughters Goneril and Regan, are already powerful men in the north and south-west of the British Isles. Cordelia is due to be married either to the Duke of Burgundy or the King of France. This is therefore a ceremonial division of the kingdom, a planned succession, but one that Cordelia’s truthful declaration upsets and disrupts.¹⁹ In *King Lear* the question of succession is crucial, both to the opening division, and in the final scene – even if the scripts do not agree. Albany becomes King in the Quarto, and Edgar in the Folio.

In *Macbeth* there are three stages to the witches’ prophecy of the titles he will bear. He is Thane of Glamis before the play begins, noting that he had taken that title from his father: “By Finel’s death, I know I am Thane of Glamis”.²⁰ Before the witches speak to him the audience, though not yet Macbeth, know he is to take the title of the Thane of Cawdor, executed for treason. Macbeth hears the prophecy, and very soon after is given this second title.²¹ However the third step,

that he will be “king hereafter” is challenged by King Duncan’s choice of Malcolm as heir: “We will establish our estate upon/Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter,/The Prince of Cumberland”.²² This presents Macbeth with “a step/on I which I must fall down, or else o’er-leap,/For in my way it lies”.²³ Then, when Duncan is murdered, there is the coronation of the new King and the burial of the old discussed in a few brief lines:

Ross: ... Then ‘tis most like

The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.

Macduff: He is already named, and gone to Scone

To be invested.

Ross: Where is Duncan’s body?

Macduff: Carried to Colmekill,

The sacred storehouse of his predecessors.

And guardian of their bones.²⁴

While Macbeth has gained this position through foul means, the ceremonial procedure is followed very formally. Finally, at the end of the play, there is a new King, Malcolm, but he equally sets up a new political order. After he receives the acclamation “Hail King of Scotland”, he replies to them to say “My thanes and kinsmen,/Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland/In such an honour named.”²⁵ He then leaves the stage to be “crowned at Scone”.²⁶ Only the spectre of Banquo’s son Fleance, who if the witches are to be believed is at the head of a line of Kings, remains to haunt him.

Richard II – An Ignoble Transition

In *Richard II*, the crucial deposition scene shows the confrontation between Richard and Henry Bolingbroke, and the transfer of the crown from one to the other, as he becomes Henry IV. This passage of text was not in the first three quartos of the play, only appearing in the fourth Quarto of 1608 and first Folio of 1623. It is an addition to an already long scene. The first half of the scene includes a confrontation between Aumerle and Bagot, Fitzwalter, Harry Percy and other lords; and the arrest of the Bishop of Carlisle for treason. In that part of the scene, the Duke of York says to Bolingbroke:

Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee
From plume-plucked Richard, who with willing soul
Adopts thee heir, and his high sceptre yields
To the possession of thy royal hand.
Ascend his throne, descending now from him,
And long live Henry, of that name the fourth!²⁷

Bolingbroke seems content: “In God’s name I’ll ascend the regal throne”,²⁸ and it is at this point that the Bishop of Carlisle objects and is arrested. In this shorter version of the scene, protocol, though forced, is being followed. Richard, though humbled (‘plume-plucked’) adopts Bolingbroke as heir, so that the transfer of the sceptre allows Henry to legitimately succeed (‘descend from’) Richard as King. In the Quarto texts, Bolingbroke then declares: “On Wednesday next we solemnly

set down/Our coronation. Lords, prepare yourselves”.²⁹ The Abbot declares that
“A woeful pageant have we here beheld”.³⁰

In the longer version of the text, though, there is a confrontation directly
between Richard and Bolingbroke.³¹ The debate is to whether the rest of this
scene was written with the rest of the play, c. 1595, and censored from print
versions, or written later.³² Without it, the play implies a much more noble
transition. After this scene, Henry is king and Richard his prisoner. Yet this can
be achieved without the extra material. Bolingbroke wants to have this transfer
made publicly. The Duke of Northumberland had already asked the assembled
lords “to grant the commons’ suit”,³³ that is, as Richard Forker glosses, to hear
“the demand that the terms of Richard’s abdication (including the charges
against him) be publicly declared in Parliament and that he be judged unworthy
of kingship”.³⁴ Bolingbroke seems to agree: “Fetch hither Richard, that in
common view/He may surrender. So we shall proceed/Without suspicion”.³⁵
When Richard asks why he has been brought before the assembly, he is told by
the Duke of York that he needs to make public his previous promise:

To do that office of thine own good will
Which tired majesty did make thee offer –
The resignation of thy state and crown
To Henry Bolingbroke.³⁶

Yet a simple transfer is not deemed sufficient. He may give up the crown and
sceptre – “I give this heavy weight from off my head,/And this unwieldy sceptre

from my hand” – relinquish “pomp and majesty... manors, rents, revenues... acts, deeds and statutes”, and declare his fealty to Henry, but he is asked for more.³⁷ Northumberland requires him to read “these accusations, and these grievous crimes/Committed by your person and your followers/Against the state and profit of this land”.³⁸ The purpose, he says, is “that, by confessing them, the souls of men/May deem that you are worthily deposed”.³⁹ Richard resists, and while Northumberland continues to insist, even Bolingbroke eventually says they should desist.⁴⁰ Northumberland notes that “the commons will not then be satisfied”, and Richard says he will “read enough” to ensure they are.⁴¹ With the direct confrontation the transfer of power is much starker, though in both versions of the play the ceremony of coronation happens off-stage, with Henry appearing as King later in the play.

It is fairly well known that Queen Elizabeth I saw her position as similar to Richard II's, and there is a story of a performance of Shakespeare's play to an audience of Lords who sought to overthrow her. This may be one reason why the passage were not published in her lifetime. After her death, King James of Scotland became the English King, and Shakespeare's theatre company became known as The King's Men – a shifting position in relation to the throne that made presumably made the scene safer to print.

King John – A Repeated Ceremony

In *King John*, John's claim to the throne is weak and he is continually threatened by enemies within and without. Right at the start of the play, before making a

claim on behalf of John's nephew Arthur, the French ambassador Chatillon describes John as "borrowed majesty", with borrowed implying assumed or stolen, and majesty meaning both sovereignty and the display of such in ceremony and attire.⁴² France believes Arthur is the legitimate king, and John has usurped the throne. Later in the play, Arthur's mother describes him as possessing "banished majesty".⁴³ And towards the end of the play it is described as the "bare-picked bone of majesty".⁴⁴ Such is the precarity of John's reign that in the play's fourth act he is re-crowned:

King John: Here once again we sit, once again crowned,
And looked upon, I hope, with cheerful eyes.

Pembroke: This 'once again', but that your highness pleased,
Was once superfluous. You were crowned before,
And that high royalty was ne'er plucked off,
The faiths of men ne'er stained with revolt;
Fresh expectation troubled not the land
With any longed-for change or better state.

Salisbury: Therefore, to be possessed with double pomp,
To guard a title that was rich before,
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish.
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.⁴⁵

The display is redundant, showing his weakness rather than his strength, possessed with 'double pomp', but really owning only the ceremony, and indeed, owned by it, rather than a particular office. The speech of Pembroke can be read as strengthening the king; the one by Salisbury can only be seen as mocking. "Double pomp" clearly jars, as does Salisbury's later "new crown'd",⁴⁶ as the King justifies himself, using a property relation which is both active and passive: "some reasons for this double coronation/I have possess'd you with and think them strong".⁴⁷ Then again, in Act Five, the King has accepted his subservient position to the Pope, in order to have his excommunication lifted, and to receive his sovereignty again.

King John: Thus have I yielded up into your hand.

The circle of my glory.

Cardinal Pandulph: Take again

From this my hand, as holding of the Pope,

Your sovereign greatness and authority.⁴⁸

Thus John has to perform the ceremony three times. The first, which is sometimes staged, or sometimes taken to have preceded the opening of the play, is already threatened by France's support for Arthur. Second, having seen off the threat of Arthur, he has it performed again; and third, having debased himself to the Pope, who now is spiritual and temporal ruler of England, he is granted his kingship once more. England was, at that time, invaded by the French, led by the King's son, the Dauphin, and John felt he had no choice but to beg for Rome's

support. The blessing from the Pope means that the French invasion will be ended, though this does not meet with general approval.

King John: The legate of the Pope hath been with me,
And I have made a happy peace with him,
And he hath promised to dismiss the powers
Led by the Dauphin.

Bastard: O inglorious league!
Shall we upon the footing of our land
Sent fair-play orders and make compromise,
Insinuation, parley, and base truce
To arms invasive?⁴⁹

None of the ceremonies, then, are without challenge. The first, widely accepted, is challenged by France. The second is mocked by his courtiers. The third is seen as disdainful by his closest ally. Yet despite these challenges, John is never overthrown, and dies on the throne. Though poisoned, he is at least able to hand the crown to his son.

A further example would be the denial of a political ritual in *Coriolanus*, where the returning military hero refuses to display his wounds in the public square. Coriolanus's mother Volumnia and the politician Menenius count his wounds, enumerating a calculus of pain from the battlefields that can be expended in the political marketplace.⁵⁰ A ceremonial display of his body is required, but breaking with custom, the newly named Coriolanus is unwilling to show his

wounds to the crowd. The tribunes Siculus and Brutus, who wish to oppose Coriolanus' election, interpret this failure to display his heroic body as an affront to the people. They succeed in getting the citizens to take their side, to Coriolanus's condemnation for treason, and his banishment from the city. He leaves, joining forces with Rome's enemies and leads an attack on Rome. The consequences are, of course far worse, and more properly traitorous, than the refusal.⁵¹

Henry IV – A Parody and Anticipation

The last example from Shakespeare will be regarding King Henry V, from his time as prince to king. In the two parts of *Henry IV*, there are two ceremonies. One is a mock ceremonial gathering in a public house, with Falstaff and Prince Hal pretending to be the king and the prince. In the second, there is the actual ceremony of Hal's coronation as King Henry V.

The mock ceremony of Part I is sometimes called the 'play extempore'.⁵² As Charles Edelman suggests, "of all the episodes in *Henry IV, Part I*, none is more revealing about the relationship of Falstaff and the Prince".⁵³ The scene begins with Falstaff playing King Henry IV, and admonishing Prince Hal. Hal instructs him: "Do thou stand for my father and examine me upon the particulars of my life".⁵⁴ Falstaff readily agrees, and says "This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown".⁵⁵ It is clear to the audience that this is a play within a play, while it also makes them aware of the theatre they are in, and equally suggests "that power itself is a form of theatre".⁵⁶ Ceremony is, here,

itself theatre, taking place in the theatre. Falstaff tells Hal off for much of his behaviour, including stealing purses, and yet says that he knows “a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name”. Of course, he means himself – “a goodly, portly man”.⁵⁷ Falstaff, as the King, suggests that Hal “him keep with; the rest banish”.⁵⁸

It then switches, with Hal suggesting he should play the king, and Falstaff, him. Again they turn to the company Hal keeps, and this time Falstaff is described negatively: “There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion”.⁵⁹ Hal, as the King, piles on insult after insult, humorous perhaps, but with a sharp, nasty, edge. Falstaff, as Hal, says that he knows the man, but implies not the qualities attributed to him.⁶⁰ Again, the conversation shifts to who Hal should keep in his company, and again Falstaff – pleading as himself, effectively – says that all the others can be banished, but not Jack Falstaff, repeating twice “banish not him thy Harry’s company”. He ends with a final plea: “Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world”.⁶¹ Hal’s response is the terse, “I do, I will”.⁶² In the present tense he is within the mock play, playing the present King, and the intent is humour; in the future tense he is anticipating himself as King, and is entirely serious.⁶³

Just how serious becomes clear in the closing scenes of the second part of *Henry IV*. Hal is now king, following the death of his father, and Falstaff hopes that this will give him preferment in the new regime. He awaits the King’s ceremonial procession. As he says to his friend Justice Shallow, having borrowed money off him in expectation of the riches to come his way: “I will make the King do you

grace. I will leer upon him as 'a comes by, and do but mark the countenance that he will give me".⁶⁴ Of course, he would be expected to bow his head, not glance or smile at him. As the King passes, Falstaff calls to him: "God save thy grace, King Hal, my royal Hal!... God save thee, my sweet boy!" But the King turns him aside: "My Lord Chief Justice, speak to that vain man". The Lord questions Falstaff: "Have you your wits? Know you what 'tis you speak?"⁶⁵ There follows the terribly sad exchange:

Falstaff: My King, my Jove, I speak to thee, my heart!

King: I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.

How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!

I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,

So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane;

But being awaked, I do despise my dream.

Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace.

Leave gormandizing: know the grave doth gape

For thee thrice wider than for other men.

Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.

Presume not that I am the thing I was,

For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,

That I have turned away my former self;

So will I those that kept me company.

When thou dost hear I am as I have been,

Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast,

The tutor and the feeder of my riots;

Till then I banish thee, on pain of death,
As I have done the rest of my misleaders,
Not to come near our person by ten mile...⁶⁶

While there are glimpses of the young Hal, such as the comment about the size of the grave required, he quickly turns back to his new poise and measured language. He does balance the banishment and threat with provision of means of support, dependent on behavior improving, but he wants nothing more to do with him. Falstaff tries to convince Shallow, or perhaps himself: “do not you grieve on this. I shall be sent for in private to him. Look you, he must seem thus to the world”.⁶⁷ But he must know the friendship, and his hopes for high office, has come to an end. The Lord Chief Justice returns, after the King’s party has left, and instructs his officers: “Go, carry Sir John Falstaff to the Fleet./Take all his company along with him”.⁶⁸ Whether this trip to the Fleet prison is long-term, or a temporary measure while the coronation ceremony continues, is unclear. The King had previously said that “this new and gorgeous garment, majesty/Sits not so easy on me as you think”.⁶⁹ And yet here, with perhaps his first real test, he has made good on his promise in the first part of *Henry IV*.

By the time it comes to the play that bears his name, King Henry V is having doubts about precisely this question of ceremony. In the night before the battle of Agincourt he speaks about his concerns:

What infinite heart’s ease
Must kings neglect that private men enjoy!

And what have kings that privates have not too,
Save ceremony, save general ceremony?
And what are thou, thou idol ceremony?
What kind of god are thou, that suffer'st more
Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?
What are thy rents, what are thy comings-in?
O ceremony, show me but thy worth!...
I am a king that find thee, and I know
'Tis not the balm, the scepter and the ball,
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,
The farced title running 'fore the king,
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
That beats upon the high shore of the world,
No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony...⁷⁰

Ceremony then, both in the display of this and the recognition that comes with it, comes at a cost, the loss of privacy and the gain of responsibility. The various trappings of ceremony, from the anointing oil to the orb and scepter, the ceremonial weapons and the throne and crown, all these are mere display. For Eric La Guardia, this is part of Henry's weakness, a mirror image of the flaw of another king: "Excessive faith in symbol and ceremony is represented by Richard II. At the other extreme stands Henry V, committed to history rather than ceremony".⁷¹

Many of Shakespeare's plays, history and tragedy, thus demonstrate the importance of ritual and ceremony, a political theatre. And, more, that political theatre – as in Shakespeare – is itself a form of ceremony. Yet what is striking is that in these plays they are often ceremonies that are censored, repeated, refused, or parodied. We could add the contested ceremony of *Titus Andronicus*, where the dead Emperor's sons Bassianus and Saturninus dispute the succession, and the title character celebrates his triumph but refuses the imperial honour himself.⁷² While it is disappointing that Foucault did not elaborate on his few remarks on Shakespeare and the political ceremony, he does provide us with a lens through which to begin to examine the plays.

The *Théories et institutions pénales* course

Foucault was certainly long fascinated by the theatre, and especially its relation to political ceremony. This article will close with a focus on the recently published, and as-yet-untranslated, 1971-72 Collège de France course *Théories et institutions pénales*.⁷³ This course has been reconstructed on the basis of Foucault's lecture notes – unlike most of the courses, there are no tape recordings. This means that the course is somewhat fractured and some of its transitions abrupt. We can assume Foucault made many of the transitions smoother in its oral delivery. The course is formed of two parts. The first discusses the revolution of the *Nu-pieds*, the bare-foot revolts against taxation in Normandy in the 17th century. He is interested in the suppression of the revolt, and the ceremonial aspects of political power by Cardinal Richelieu and Chancellor Séguier. The second looks at a longer period and the emergence of

medieval legal codes and the state from earlier Germanic models. The first is the most important here, because of the way Foucault constructs his analysis of the suppression, which is in the form of a play in five acts.

Later that same year Foucault gave a presentation in Minnesota, on 7 April 1972, shortly after the end of this course. That lecture, entitled ‘Cérémonie, théâtre et politique au XVIIe siècle’ was previously only available in an English summary made by Stephen Davidson, in relatively hard-to-find conference proceedings.⁷⁴ Foucault clearly drew on material from the first half of this course in his lecture, even though he reframed it for the specific event. The lecture summary, not being by Foucault’s own hand, did not appear in the major edition of his shorter writings produced by Daniel Defert and François Ewald in 1994, but is translated into French as an appendix to *Théories et institutions pénales*, thus giving it semi-canonical status.⁷⁵

The analysis of the political ceremony is important for multiple reasons. Foucault is clear that it must not be analysed through a semiology, but rather by “an analysis of forces”.⁷⁶ He suggests that Séguier provides both a “political distribution of repression”, and “a theatrical representation of power: that is a development [*déroulement*] in time and space, in a visible and ceremonial form, of man, signs and discourse, through which the exercise of power takes place”.⁷⁷ In Paris and Minnesota, Foucault presents the successive elements of the repression as a ceremony, a sequence of scenes or theatrical acts. Foucault describes this as the “theatre of power”.⁷⁸

The detail of the five acts is too much for more than a cursory analysis here.⁷⁹

The first stage is sending in the army against the peasant revolt, without any judicial or civilian power. The army executes and tortures, this is power at its most brutal and unconstrained. The second stage is local courts and politicians intervening, either through muted opposition or through sending delegations to Paris. These local powers are checks or brakes on the power of the crown. The third stage is the entry of civilian power, when Chancellor Séguier and other officials travel to Normandy. This is the entry of civilian justice, but without all the usual restrictions on its use. Foucault notes that Séguier is able to do this without the King's direct involvement. The fourth act concerns the changes Séguier makes in Normandy, through appointment of new people to positions, and a reorientation of the relation between the local and central powers. The fifth and final act concerns the restructuring of financial and military power. Local forces are disarmed, and military power centralised; and compensation is due from the region through direct and indirect taxation.

Foucault thinks it is important that he can discern the "first great deployment of the 'arms' of the State independent of the person of the King".⁸⁰ It is significant that Foucault stresses the clash of competing exercises of power: this is not power imposed simply from above. The King, the State, individuals such as Séguier, and the peasants all exercise power. "For the *Nu-pieds*, the rejection of the law is at the same time a law... the rejection of justice is like the exercise of justice; the struggle against power is a kind of power".⁸¹ Nonetheless, as the notes to an early lecture suggest, "power is still here studied as a form of *representation* (manifestations, gestures, ceremonies, symbols, etc.)".⁸² Perhaps,

as well as Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*, the text of his we should be examining is *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship*.⁸³ There, Kantorowicz shows how inscriptions, texts and music of rituals and ceremonies can shed considerable light on political and religious power. It is also important that one of Kantorowicz's early examples of the distinction and relation between the *corpus mysticum* and the King's mortal body in *The King's Two Bodies* is a detailed reading of Shakespeare's *Richard II*.⁸⁴

The theme returns in *Discipline and Punish*. It is most striking in the chapter on *supplice*, the particularly visual and public form of torture of which the execution of the regicide Damiens had been the book's opening example. Foucault suggests that "judicial *supplice* is to be understood also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies through which power is manifested".⁸⁵ Tellingly, Foucault describes the analysis of this "penal liturgy", and suggests that such an execution is "a ceremonial through which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted... The public execution... belongs to a whole series of great rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored (coronation, entry of the king into a conquered city, the submission of rebellious subjects)".⁸⁶ Taking this perspective, Foucault suggests, "enables us to understand some of the characteristics of the liturgy of *supplice* – above all, the importance of a ritual that was to deploy its pomp [*son faste*] in public. Nothing was to be hidden of this triumph of the law".⁸⁷

While the visual, spectacular nature of exemplary power would play a central role in the opening scene of *Discipline and Punish*, in the lectures which preceded

the book Foucault was searching for formulations that traced a less visible, more anonymous form of power. There are initial traces of that in 1971-72, developed in much more detail in the 1972-73 course, *The Punitive Society*, where de-personalised systems and relations become his predominant focus.⁸⁸ But the events outlined in this first part of the 1971-72 course *Théories et institutions pénales* are, for Foucault, fundamental to the emergence of a new system of the exercise of political power, which becomes the idea of penal justice. Yet in the analysis of the suppression of the *Nu-pieds* revolts, and in the execution of Damiens, Foucault gives us some important insights into earlier forms of power. It seems that is the basis for his interest in Shakespeare.

These texts therefore begin to show how we might understand the relation between ceremony, theatre and politics in Foucault and Shakespeare. Foucault provides an indication of a project, and leaves it for others to begin to construct how it might be undertaken.

Notes

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- 2 M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays*,
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II to Henry V*, London: Hollis & Carter, 1957; and G. Wilson Knight, *The
Sovereign Flower: On Shakespeare as the Poet of Royalism*, London:
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with a detailed background part, and then readings of the plays, including
both tetralogies and *King John*; Traversi is a fairly straight-forward
presentation of the *Richard II-Henry IV-Henry V* sequence; Wilson Knight
comprises one major essay, "This Sceptred Isle: A Study of Shakespeare's
Kings", pp. 11-91, and various other pieces. I am grateful to John Russell
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- 3 Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, Cambridge: Polity, 2016; *Foucault:
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- 4 For an overall discussion, and useful references, see Andrew Cutrofello,
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- 5 Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population: Cours au Collège de
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- 6 Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population*, p. 271; *Security, Territory,
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fullest account, see Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the
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- 9 Bennett, *The Madness of George III*, p. 35.
- 10 Michel Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique: Cours au Collège de France
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23; *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974*,
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117; *History of Sexuality Volume I*, translated by Robert Hurley, London:
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- 12 Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique*, p. 22; *Psychiatric Power*, pp. 20-21.
- 13 Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique*, p. 23; *Psychiatric Power*, pp. 21-22.
- 14 Michel Foucault, «*Il faut défendre la société*»: *Cours au Collège de France
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Seuil/Gallimard, 1997, p. 155; '*Society Must Be Defended*', translated by
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- “the passage in brackets has been reconstructed from Foucault’s manuscript” (*«Il faut défendre la société»*, p. 166 n. 6; *‘Society Must Be Defended’*, p. 187 n. 6).
- 15 *Hamlet*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006, Act V, scene ii, 339-40. This edition is based on the second Quarto. This passage does not appear in the first Quarto of 1603, but appears in the second Quarto and Folio texts. See *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006.
- 16 *Hamlet*, Act V, scene ii, 372-4. The first Quarto has ‘leisure’ in place of ‘vantage’; the Folio has some differences in word-order.
- 17 Michel Foucault, *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*, edited by Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomani, Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999, pp. 13-4; translated by Graham Burchell as *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, London: Verso, 2003, p. 13.
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- 19 For a discussion of the question of land in this play, see Stuart Elden, “The Geopolitics of *King Lear*: Territory, Land, Earth”, *Law and Literature*, Vol 25 No 2, 2013, pp. 147-65.
- 20 *Macbeth*, edited by Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason, London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015, Act I, scene iii, 71.
- 21 The title is prophesied in Act I, scene iii, 49, and conferred in the same scene, 106.
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- 23 *Macbeth*, Act I, scene iv, 48-50.
- 24 *Macbeth*, Act II, scene iv, 29-35.
- 25 *Macbeth*, Act V, scene ix, 28-30.
- 26 *Macbeth*, Act V, scene ix, 41.
- 27 *Richard II*, edited by Charles Forker, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002, Act IV, scene I, 108-113.
- 28 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 114.
- 29 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 319-20.
- 30 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 321.
- 31 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 155-318.
- 32 For a discussion see “Introduction” to *Richard II*, edited by Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 9-16.
- 33 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 155.
- 34 Forker in *Richard II*, p. 392.
- 35 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 156-8.
- 36 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 178-81.
- 37 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 204-5, 211-3.
- 38 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 223-5.
- 39 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 226-7.

- 40 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 271.
- 41 *Richard II*, Act IV, scene I, 272-3.
- 42 *The Life and Death of King John*, edited by A.R. Braunmuller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, Act I, scene i, 4.
- 43 *King John*, Act III, scene i, 321.
- 44 *King John*, Act IV, scene iii, 148.
- 45 *King John*, Act IV, scene ii, 1-16. This may have actually been his fourth coronation. See L.A. Beaurline, "Supplementary Notes", in *King John*, edited by L.A. Beaurline, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 177.
- 46 *King John*, Act IV, scene II, 35.
- 47 *King John*, Act IV, scene ii, 40-1; see Braunmuller, "Introduction", p. 50.
- 48 *King John*, Act V, scene I, 1-4.
- 49 *King John*, Act V, scene I, 62-69.
- 50 See Zvi Jagendorf, "Coriolanus: Body Politic and Private Parts", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 41 No 4, 1990, pp. 455-69, p. 464.
- 51 For a longer discussion, see Stuart Elden, "The Political Bodies of *Coriolanus*", in Jenny Edkins and Adrian Kear (eds.), *International Politics and Performance: Critical Aesthetics and Creative Practice*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 182-203.
- 52 *King Henry IV Part 1*, edited by David Scott Kastan, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002, Act II, scene iv, 271. Subsequent references are to this edition unless otherwise noted.
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- 54 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 366-7.
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- 57 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 407-8, 410.
- 58 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 418.
- 59 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 435-6.
- 60 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 452.
- 61 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 465-7.
- 62 *King Henry IV Part 1*, Act II, scene iv, 468.
- 63 See Edelman, "Introduction", p. xli; Kastan, note to *King Henry IV Part 1*, p. 234.
- 64 *King Henry IV, Part 2*, edited by James C. Bulman, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2016, Act V, scene v, 5-8.
- 65 *King Henry IV, Part 2*, Act V, scene v, 39-44.
- 66 *King Henry IV, Part 2*, Act V, scene v, 46-64.
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- 68 *King Henry IV, Part 2*, Act V, scene v, 90-91.
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- 75 Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales*, pp. 235-41.
- 76 Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales*, p. 47.
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- 78 Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales*, p. 49.
- 79 A fuller discussion can be found in Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power*, Ch. 2.
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- 81 Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales*, p. 30.
- 82 Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales*, p. 54 n. 16.
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- 84 Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, pp. 24-41. See David Norbrook, "The Emperor's New Body? Richard II, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare's Criticism", *Textual Practice*, Vol 10 No 2, 1996, pp. 329-57; Anselm Haverkamp, "Richard II, Bracton, and the End of Political Theology", *Law and Literature*, Vol 16 No 3, 2004, pp. 313-26.
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